



# Passing It On

Morning Star Community Services gave Teresa Wong a new lease of family life and prompted her to share what she received with other parents in need.

BY EVELYN MAK PHOTO BY STEVE ZHU



It was a desire to improve her parenting skills that brought homemaker Teresa Wong and her husband to Morning Star Community Services (MSCS) in 2003. Then, Teresa's oldest son was going through a phase of behavioural problems that confounded his parents. One of Teresa's friends suggested the family attend counselling sessions at MSCS in Hougang.

"The counselling was of great help; the counsellor advised us on how to deal with the problems we were facing," recalls Teresa. Although her son was unwilling to join the sessions initially, he thawed after seeing a change in his parents' behaviour. Eventually, he joined them.

"During the sessions with our son, we learnt to listen to each other and took the opportunity to talk things out." After six months of intermittent counselling, the Wongs found themselves communicating better with each other — Teresa and her husband were also able to straighten out problems they had been experiencing.

## TAKING THE NEXT STEP

Formed in 1999 as a community service project of the Catholic Archdiocese of Singapore, MSCS' mission is to enrich and strengthen family relationships, and to build vibrant communities. Programmes and services offered include student care services, family wellness programmes and social work services.

When Teresa's family completed their counselling sessions, she decided to participate as a volunteer in the organisation's programmes. Today, this 45-year-old whose three children are now aged between nine and 14 is an associate trainer for the Chinese language 'Common Sense Parenting Workshop'. She herself enrolled in the same course some years back.

With help from her late father, she translated workshop materials into Chinese and underwent training to pick up teaching skills. "My trainer taught me things like how to hold the attention of my class and how to come up with the right examples during workshops. I was very nervous at the start, but with lots of prayers, I made it," she laughs.

Sharing her reasons for getting involved with MSCS

activities, Teresa says, "I received so much from MSCS and I believe there are many families who face the same problems I did but don't know where to turn for help. I am happy to have the opportunity to pass on what I've learnt and received from here."

## STRENGTHENING RELATIONSHIPS, BUILDING FRIENDSHIPS

In her capacity as a volunteer trainer, Teresa has met many parents who have left an impression on her. "I remember a mother who didn't say much. When she eventually opened up, she told us her son's teacher had labelled the boy a "disruptive" student. She was very upset, and I told her the boy wasn't being naughty, he just didn't understand what he had to do in class," Teresa shares.

Through role-play during a workshop session, the mother learnt how to help her son. "The little boy went to his mother one day and reported that his teacher had called him a "good boy". He was so proud of his achievement," smiles Teresa.

Seeing how she can make a difference has brought great satisfaction to Teresa. "I am happy for the parents and glad to have a chance to give families the hope of building better relationships," she says. Teresa also finds she's become happier and more cheerful because she has been blessed with the chance to contribute to someone else's life.

Teresa not only hopes to continue to play an active role in MSCS projects this year, she also encourages friends and family to join her. "No matter how much you do, you will receive more in return. I may not have gained anything materially, but I have found friendship and love. My children have also picked up many life skills they may never have picked up in school," she shares.

As a parent herself and having seen many families respond positively to her workshop, Teresa is quick to point out what she feels is the most important parenting skill. "Praise your children," she encourages. "Acknowledge the things they have done well. The more you acknowledge them, the more positively they will act. The child will feel recognised, loved and secure." 🌱